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ABSTRACT

In Sweden, initial vocational education (IVT) is financed by public money and is designed to provide basic skills and general qualifications to perform certain functions in an occupation. Continuing vocational training (CVT) is provided primarily by public school institutions, private enterprises, and training companies, trade unions, and employer associations and is subject to negotiations and local solutions between stakeholders. Adult schooling traditions in Sweden emanate from the mid-19th century, and traditions for improving popular literacy can be traced to the late 18th century. The early 1990s were characterized by increasing recognition of the need for recurrent education. The model of recurrent education has since been replaced by the broader concept of lifelong learning. In the interests of developing a comprehensive system for promoting lifelong learning, radical changes were instituted in Sweden's systems of IVT and CVT in the 1990s. The most profound change in IVT was the institution of apprenticeship-like programs that combined special subjects from various programs to create specially designed programs reflecting demand from local enterprises. The reforms within CVT included development of the following programs: a pilot project on advanced vocational education; the Adult Education Initiative; and individual learning accounts. Lifelong learning has become an integrated component of Swedish educational policies. (Contains 27 references.) (MN)

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The impact of lifelong learning on vocational education and training in Sweden

Mats Lindell

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Introduction

One of the main goals in Swedish education policy since the late 1960s has been to unify vocational and general education into a single integrated education system. There were three major reasons for these developments. The first was to make vocational education more general thus enabling students to develop the flexibility they would require in a rapidly changing labour market. The second was to adjust social biases by attracting prospective students from upper social groups. The third was to ensure access to upper secondary schooling for all youngsters regardless of sex, social and economic background and locality of residence (Abrahamsson et al. 1988).

The first step in implementing the new policy was taken in 1971 when vocational and trade schools were formally integrated into what became a new upper secondary school, so merging the gymnasium school tradition with the ideas and cultures from the vocational ones. The integration process was completed with the introduction of the 1990 reform (Lindell & Johansson 2001).

In comparison with other vocational education and training (VET) systems in Europe, especially those emphasising 'dual model' systems, the Swedish VET system has, since 1971, no separate schools for vocational training. In accordance with the general integration philosophy, the idea is rather to narrow the gap between vocational and general education as much as possible. The implication is a comprehensive school system with a common core curriculum, which does not separate pupils attending different programs before upper secondary level. In addition, the curricula for compulsory and upper secondary education have nationwide validity (National Agency for Education 1999a).

Another important difference is that the Swedish education system does not have, like England and Germany, a tradition of apprenticeship schemes working in close co-operation with industry and commerce. Although there are apprenticeship-like programs at the upper secondary level in Sweden, these are on a very small scale (Lindell 2000).

The idea of narrowing the gap between various forms of education by combining them into one public education system was also to be applied to the various streams of adult education and continuing training.

To sum up, Swedish vocational education and training has, since the late 1960s, gone from being a system which was primarily industry-based to being a school-based system which was integrated with general education. Today the Swedish education system comprises a structurally uniform system ranging from elementary schooling to upper secondary schooling and adult education. The move to integrate vocational and general education is a reflection of how the state has perceived its role in relation to upgrading qualifications of the work force and increasing the supply of skilled labour (Abrahamsson 1999).

The framework of vocational education and training

With an integrated system of vocational and general education, a clear-cut definition of the Swedish system of vocational education and training (VET) is not an easy task. Combined with the fact that new education reforms emerge and others disappear, it becomes even more difficult to arrive at a conceptual framework. However, the VET system can be thought of in terms of two major categories. These are initial vocational education (IVE) and continuing vocational training (CVT). According to the definition, IVT includes the vocationally oriented programs provided in upper secondary school, while CVT encompasses all post-secondary vocational education and continuing adult training, including in-house training. However, CVT does not include professional degrees at university level (Abrahamsson 1999).

Initial vocational education

Initial vocational education (IVE) provides basic skills and general qualifications, which qualify the newly trained to carry out certain functions in an occupation. In principle, all initial vocational education in Sweden is provided within the upper secondary schools within and comprises 15 different vocationally oriented education, reflecting different sectors of the Swedish Labour market. All education (or programs as they are also referred to) within IVE are, since 1990, of three years' duration (Lindell & Adams 2000).

IVE is basically financed by public money and involves about 150 000 pupils per annum. The transition rate from upper secondary education to tertiary education has also increased significantly during the past decade. At present, almost 45% of upper secondary students continue to higher education within three years after completing their upper secondary school examination (National Agency for Education 1999). This expansion, in turn, has resulted in an increase of participation in particular vocationally oriented study programs.

Continuing vocational training

While developments in general education has been a result of decisions by parliament and the government, developments in vocational education has been highly influenced by various stakeholders such as employer and employee organisations. This is particularly true of in-house training (IHT). The result is that although national agencies like the National Agency for Education and the National Labour Market Board play a key role, several streams of vocational education within CVT are not regulated by law. It is instead subject to the negotiations and local solutions between the stakeholders.

Continuing vocational training (CVT) is by tradition viewed by the stakeholders in society as a prerequisite for maintaining a highly qualified labour force in the face of rapid technological and industrial change. Accordingly, the stakeholders together with the parliament agree that almost all IVE and the major components of CVT (with the exception of in-company training) should be publicly funded. This has to do, in part, with the extensive representation of the social partners in the various administrative bodies, especially at regional and local levels. It has also to do with the general educational philosophy that all people, regardless of economic means, should have access to training.

The main providers of CVT are public school institutions, private enterprises and training companies. To some extent, trade unions and employer associations also provide training.

Individual incentives for participating in CVT are to a large extent determined by increased demand for skills in the new labour market context and by the motivation of individuals to avoid unemployment. Education and training has become an increasingly necessary tool to respond to new skill demands and a more efficient and flexible work organisation. This also has an impact on individual study motivation and incentives for lifelong learning. Using the definition by Abrahamsson (1999), CVT includes:

- in-house training
- labour market training
- vocational training within municipal adult education
- higher vocational programs for technicians

In-house training

During the 1980s, ongoing changes in work organisation and development of information and communication technologies, demanding higher competence among workers, led to a rapid growth of in-house training—that is, education, which is organised by and/or paid by employers' organisations or commissioned for employees (Abrahamsson 1999). In-house training (IHT) provided by companies and public authorities has expanded faster than any other form of CVT during the 1980s and currently comprises the greatest proportion of CVT. Over the last decade IHT participation rates have almost doubled (Statistics Sweden 1998).

Although employers are generally responsible for determining the type of in-house training that they will provide, trade unions are also able to exert varying degrees of influence. Collective agreements concerning the provision of IHT are few. The teaching sector is one exception where training is regulated by law and in collective agreements.

IHT is organised partly by companies and administrative authorities and financed by employers. The costs for IHT in 1997 accounted for about 95% of the total cost for CVT (Statistics Sweden 1998). The growth in IHT has also generated a competitive market for education in which municipalities, universities and private educational consultants play an active role.

Typically the number of persons taking part in IHT is greater in the public sector than in the private sector. Civil servants and middle-aged and full-time employees are all groups who receive comparatively more IHT than other groups. In addition, IHT is more widespread in service enterprises and authorities than in industry. There is relatively less IHT provided in small businesses than is provided in large companies and public administration agencies. During the last years, an increasing gap concerning in-service education participation, has been observed between blue-collar workers on the one side and white-collar workers and professional employees on the other side. To a large extent, IHT takes place during working hours, but there are also cases of training being supported by employers outside working hours.

Labour market training

Labour market training is primarily intended to help unemployed persons and hard-to-place job seekers lacking occupational skills. The training programs are largely vocational, but can cover introductory and general theoretical instruction as a necessary adjunct to vocational training. Applicants for these programs must be at least 20 years of age and registered with the public employment service as a job seeker. During the recent years of high unemployment, labour market training in Sweden has increasingly been re-oriented towards applicants with both occupational experience and a relatively good educational background. This constitutes a major shift in focus on providing training for at-risk groups, towards a concentration on providing access to training for groups with the necessary skills and experience to benefit from this training.

Labour market training of today is mainly delivered on a contractor–provider basis, which means that public investment in employment training is channelled through the Swedish Labour Market Board and its regional labour market boards, while central responsibility for labour market training resides with the National Labour Market Board. Support for the provision of labour market-type training is given to employers in the form of financial incentives for the training of employees.

Vocational training within municipal adult education

Municipal adult education for persons over 20 years of age has existed in Sweden since the year 1968 and includes basic adult education, upper secondary adult education and supplementary education for adults. These studies enable participants to acquire formal qualifications in individual subjects or to complete the equivalent of a leaving certificate from the compulsory school and/or the upper secondary school.

The purpose of supplementary adult education is to provide vocational courses that are not available in the youth education sector. Courses lead to higher professional competence or competence in a new profession.

In 1998, Statistics Sweden assessed the proportions of students of the different forms of studies available. The study showed that of the roughly 195 000 students, approximately 17% of them participated in studies corresponding to compulsory school. About 80% participated in studies corresponding to the upper secondary

school, while 3% participated in supplementary education programs (Statistics Sweden 1998).

Higher vocational programs for technicians

Higher vocational programs for technicians are intended for those who have at least four years of relevant work experience. The purpose of these programs is to give students who wish to develop a wider and deeper knowledge within a defined technical occupation. The programs, which commenced in the middle of the 1970s, are provided by the institutions of higher education, (for example, technical colleges and universities).

In the 2000–01 academic school year there were around 30 different programs available at seventeen different locations around Sweden. They covered industry-specific areas including Building construction; Industrial electronics; and Steel and metal production processes. The average length of a higher vocational program is 1.5 years. The completion of such a program accounts for 60 academic points and provides graduates with a university diploma.

Expenditures of VET

The total cost, both private and public, of the education system in Sweden for the year 1997 was estimated by Statistics Sweden at about SEK 200 billion (EURO 24 billion), which is about 11.5% of gross domestic product (GDP) (Andersson 2000). The major components of CVT are publicly financed with the exception of in-house training of which around 50% takes place within the public sector and is thus also financed by public funds, although not through the state education budget. A breakdown of these details appears in table 1.

Table 1: Estimated total cost for VET in Sweden in 1997

Education form	Cost (million SEK)	Per cent of GDP	Cost (million EURO)
Initial vocational training	13 300	0.8	1 560
Continuing vocational training	52 900	3.1	6 230
Total	**66 200**	**3.9**	**7 790**

Source: Andersson 2000

From recurrent education to lifelong learning

Although the concept of lifelong learning has become increasingly popular in various policy quarters, its roots have a long history. Adult schooling traditions in Sweden emanate from the mid-19th century and traditions for improving popular literacy can be traced back to the end of the 18th century (Abrahamsson 1988).

The concept of recurrent education has been used in a number of more or less elastic policy contexts for the last few decades. When it was launched in the late 60s, it had the flavour of a broader and more coherent educational strategy. Over the years, however, there has been a conceptual transformation of recurrent education and its early focus on equity and access in the light of second-chance policies has given way to a much stronger economic perspective (Abrahamsson 1996).

The early 1990s can be characterised by a significant shift in education values and ideas in Sweden. The role of working life orientation and preparation has been redefined in the new national curriculum for the compulsory school and for upper secondary school and municipal adult education. More attention is being paid to the quality of subject content and academic preparation at the expense of working life orientation (Abrahamsson 1991a).

Nowadays the model of recurrent education has been more or less abolished in preference to the broader concept of lifelong learning. In practice, however, the major shift in the educational landscape comprises an extension of the educational career by expanding the educational route both at the starting point (adapting to the European early school start), and also postponing or delaying the point of educational departure. This development of a more front-loaded educational model is in sharp contrast to ideas of recurrent education where learning is distributed over the life span in a continuous alternation of education, work and civic activities.

Lifelong learning is neither an obligation nor only a matter of personal preferences, but a growing necessity in the new economy with its high level of job turnover and new demands for flexibility and almost continuous life-transitions. Thus, learning and adaptation is an ongoing lifelong process. Individual incentives for self-directed learning must be promoted, institutional and psychological barriers eliminated and a broad provision of learning options adapted to different life-stages; needs and flexible life-patterns have to be delivered. Rights and duties, obligations and voluntary activities, options and challenges have to be transformed into lifelong learning contracts (Abrahamsson 2001).

The modern concept of lifelong learning relates to terms such as lifelong education, continuing education, recurrent education and the French concept of *éducation*

permanente (Hasan 1996). More broadly, lifelong learning can be seen as a policy framework and set of tools to facilitate various forms of individual and collective life transitions including transitions from school to work, from work to work, from work to further education, from work to family and back to work, from work to retirement and to post-retirement work. Thus, lifelong learning policies have a symbiotic and hopefully constructive relationship with policies dealing with social security and welfare, economic and regional development and workplace diversity, social inclusion and on working hours (Abrahamsson 1996). Lifelong learning can also be a tool for promoting better work life balance in closely connected or remotely placed time zones.

Furthermore, policies and practices in lifelong learning incorporate a number of policy fields such as quality and development of basic and compulsory education, upper secondary as well as adult and higher education. In addition, they comprise quality and development of continuous vocational education and training, in-service training and corporate learning as well as work organisation and production systems (Lundgren 1999).

Finally, policies and practices related to lifelong learning also draw energy and support from the quality and development from other reforms including financial support for study, educational leave of absence, social security and public health. More generally, the impact of lifelong learning policies and practices also depends heavily on developing strong individual incentives for learning, quality, and context of self-directed learning (Rubenson 2001).

Reforms within the Swedish VET system

In the interests of developing a comprehensive system for promoting lifelong learning, the Swedish VET system has, during the 1990s, undergone a radical change. This change has had implications for initial vocational education as well as for continuing vocational training.

Reforms within initial vocational education

In 1991, vocational education became an integrated part of the upper secondary school system. One of the most important targets of the reform was, firstly, to ensure that all people between the ages of 16 and 20 were given the right to access upper secondary school. Secondly, the variety of optional programs and special courses were redesigned into national programs reflecting the changing labour market. The reform also provided for a larger number of general subjects and a broader and more general knowledge of vocational subjects (Government Bill 1990/91:85).

During the school year 1999–00 there were 531 upper secondary schools offering 17 different national programs. Of these 15 were primarily vocationally oriented, while two (also called general programs) prepared students for higher education (National Agency of Education 2001). Most vocational programs, in the second and third year, are divided into different specialisations reflecting the labour market. For the school year 1999–00 there were 323 000 pupils within upper secondary schools, and of these roughly 150 000 were enrolled in the vocationally oriented programs. Table 2 provides a breakdown of this information.

In the vocationally oriented programs at least 15% of the students' total time should be involved in various forms of workplace training. This is syllabus-guided training. Local decisions determine which parts of these courses are to be located at a place of work. School boards at municipal or county level are responsible for the procurement of training opportunities and for supervision during workplace training.

The 1990 reform has made it possible to combine special subjects from various programs, to create specially designed programs reflecting the demand from local enterprises. These programs can, furthermore, also be individually tailored so that students can spend more than 15% of their time in workplace learning. Students are not employed by the enterprises, nor do they have an entitlement to social benefits (for example, superannuation, annual leave or sick leave) during the period.

Table 2: National programs in upper secondary school

1	The Child Recreation Program*
2	The Construction Program—Constructional metalwork; Painting; Building and construction*
3	The Electrical Engineering Program—Automation; Electronics; Installation*
4	The Energy Program—Energy; Marine engineering; Heating, ventilation and sanitation*
5	The Arts Program—Art and design; Dance and theatre; Music*
6	The Vehicle Engineering Program—Aircraft engineering; Coachwork; Vehicle engineering; Transport*
7	The Business and Administration Program*
8	The Handicraft Program—various crafts*
9	The Hotel, Restaurant and Catering Program—Hotel; Restaurant; Mass catering*
10	The Industrial Program—Industry; Process industries; Woodwork; Textile and clothing manufacturing*
11	The Food Program—Bakery and confectionery; Fresh and cured meats*
12	The Media Program—Information and advertising; Graphic media*
13	The Natural Resource Use Program*
14	The Natural Science Program—Scientific; Technical**
15	The Health Care Program—Health care; Dental nursing*
16	The Social Science Program—Economics; Liberal arts; Social science**
17	The Technical Program*

* vocationally oriented programs
** (general) programs preparing for higher education studies

Source: The National Agency for Education 2001

These apprenticeship-like programs are aimed at students who may have individual learning needs. Typically students who are involved in these programs are motivated by practical and hands-on learning.

The public sector continues to be the dominant provider of this type of education. Municipalities administer such programs for roughly 92% of the schools. Counties represent the next largest provider group and these administer for roughly 4% of the schools. It should, however, be noted that the number of independent school providers has also increased since their inception in 1993. During the 1999–00 school year, there were 73 private schools providing this form of training. In the 2000–01 academic year, this number has increased to 101 private schools, representing an increase of 40% (SOU-series 2001, p.15). The private school providers still account for only a small percentage of participating students. During the 1999–00 school year the number of students in programs provided by private schools was about 13 400 or 6% of the total student body of upper secondary schools (SOU-series 2001, p.15).

The start of the 2000–01 school year witnessed the launching of a pilot experiment testing new forms of apprenticeship within vocationally oriented programs (SFS 2000, p.690). This experiment, involving 2000 students, basically means that the traditional workplace-based training is expanded up to 700 hours, equivalent to one third of the three-year long programs. The curriculum used in the experiment contains both a general curricula including the required eight core subjects together with specific

control documents which detail the conditions for the workplace-based training. These required control documents are designed and agreed by local enterprises and schools (SOU-series 2000, p.62).

Reforms within continuing vocational training

At the same time that steps were being taken to promote lifelong learning within upper secondary school the major reforms were also made to the system of continuing vocational training. In a report commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Science in 1995, the authors concluded that the education system in Sweden must produce more people with post-secondary education focusing on vocational skills rather than academic degrees. Furthermore, the report pointed to the crucial need of developing the social and interpersonal skills of the workforce in order to keep the international competitive edge within industry (SOU-series 1995, p.38).

Advanced vocational education

The pilot project on advanced vocational education (AVE) was launched in 1996. The purpose of AVE is to meet new and higher-level demands from industry and commerce for skilled labour and the decentralisation of curriculum design from a national to a local level. The legal basis for AVE is based on Government Bill 1995/96:145 and Ordinance 1996:372. With AVE, one third of the course time is devoted to advanced application of theoretical knowledge at a workplace. The intention is that the courses should not be organised according to a traditional traineeship model, but rather revolve around active workplace-based learning and problem solving in an overall educational context. Academic points derived from AVE courses range at present from 40 points to 120 points, where one point is equivalent to one week's study. AVE courses of 80 points or longer lead to a certificate or a diploma. Courses are developed by enterprise and various course providers (upper secondary school, municipal adult education, higher education, and commercial training companies) working in close co-operation.

Today there are no restrictions in terms of the sectors in which AVE is provided. AVE is open to those coming directly from upper secondary school and also to people who are already gainfully employed and wish to develop their skills within a specific area.

The AVE pilot project has so far been successful in enabling students to find a proper job. A national evaluation study of the AVE reform, found that over 75% of the students involved in the program had received a job six months after graduation (SOU-series 1999b). The study also found that of the providers of AVE courses, municipalities were organising half (50%) of the 208 courses included in the evaluation study. The second largest category of providers was various kinds of private training companies organising 30% of the courses. The third largest group was higher institutions (technical colleges and universities) providing 20% of the courses (SOU-series 1999, p.119).

In May 2001 the Parliament decided that AVE from January 2002 would be a regular part of the CVT system. In addition, the number of AVE course programs are also to be expanded from the present 12 000 education places with an additional 500 next year (Government Bill, 2000/01).

Adult Education Initiative

The Adult Education Initiative is a five-year program of investment and development in adult education initiated by the Swedish government in July 1997. Across the country intensive work was carried out with the aim of ensuring that the hopes and expectations placed on the program could be realised by those taking part in the education and training, by public authorities and by industry.

During the first year a special 'Adult Education Initiative Delegation' was charged with looking after the contacts between the state and the municipal authorities in matters concerning the program. Since 1 July 1998 this responsibility has rested with the National Agency for Education (National Agency for Education 1999b).

In total, the AEI mission encompasses roughly 100 000 adult students per year. AEI has thus meant a large increase in the total number of pupils attending municipal adult education. During the 1996–97 school year the number of students increased to 237 128. In the following school year (1997–98) the number of students further increased by 34% in total to 316 698 (Lindell & Adams 2000). The municipal authorities are charged with the task of implementing the Adult Education Initiative while the state contributes funding for the implementation to the tune of SEK 3 billion per year (National Agency for Education 1999b).

There are also special study grants equivalent or better to the level of unemployment benefits. The grants can be obtained for 12 months' duration. The grants are particularly aimed at unemployed people aged 25–55 provided that they have at least five years of work experience and that their employer agrees to replace the individual with a long-term unemployed person (Sohlman 1999).

The uptake of AEE has to be seen in a broader political context, and as a Swedish response to a European strategy for reducing unemployment and implementing structural transformation. Instead of supporting a low-wage structure on the labour market, this policy gives high priority to the educational upgrading of the labour force. The purpose is not only to raise the employability of unemployed individuals, but also to support retention strategies at work and to help employees meet new skill requirements and better adapt to new production methods or business ideas. In short, one can also say that the AEI mission aims to establish a more comprehensive policy relating to labour market developments, to the infrastructure of adult education and training as well as supporting a fairer distribution of wealth and economic growth (SOU-series 1999, p.41).

The Adult Education Initiative can also be conceived as a crucial component in a policy of lifelong learning. The Ministers of Education of the OECD countries have highlighted three cornerstones of lifelong learning. These are: a good standard of basic

education as the foundation for lifelong learning; increased opportunities for switching between study and work throughout working life; and a clarification of the roles of, and the distribution of responsibility between, the different parties involved. If the goal of enabling individuals to continue furthering their education throughout working life is to be achieved, then this will have far-reaching consequences for the state (Abrahamsson 1991b).

The principal target group has been, and still is, unemployed adults lacking three years of upper secondary school education. The aim is to enable people to acquire greater self-confidence, increase their employability and enable them to make use of opportunities for furthering their own development in their work. The program is designed to assist participants in achieving the necessary qualifications and competence levels to undertake higher-level studies and lay the foundations for lifelong learning (Sohlman 1999).

The responsibility for creating conditions enabling these objectives to be reached lies with the municipal authorities, which are charged with building up an infrastructure for learning that meets the needs of the individual learner and of society in general.

Individual learning accounts

In December 1999, the government appointed a commissioner to analyse and design a system of individual learning accounts. The government in its Budget Bill for year 2000 (prop. 1999/2000:1) proposed that special funds be set aside to stimulate continuing individual competence development. The financial frame set out for individual competence development in the Bill amounted to SEK 1.35 billion for the year 2000 and thereafter SEK 1.15 billion annually. The task for the commissioner was to submit proposals on how budget funds set aside for individual competence development could be most effectively utilised. The commissioner was also charged with presenting a system which was flexible and durable enough to provide scope for limiting and expanding the financial framework for the future (SOU-series 2000, p.51).

One of the major ideas behind individual learning accounts, which was to be launched in January 2002, is that the individuals themselves should be better trained and prepared to navigate their way through the lifelong learning society and 'be able to steer their own competence development'. In achieving relevant competence individuals would develop self-confidence in their own ability for improving their fortunes in the labour market. The rationale from society's point of view is that individual learning accounts—in combination with other measures—could provide more favourable conditions for increasing growth and reducing the costs of unemployment (Abrahamsson 2001).

According to the proposal on how the systems should be designed, the practical payment model for the individual is built on the principle of tax exemption. Contributing for competence development should be permitted up to a level corresponding to half a base amount per year, which is currently SEK 18 300. Furthermore, contributions to the learning account should be done both by individuals and employers as part of the salary. For employers who wish to contribute, the

company pays the payroll tax and makes a preliminary tax deduction. The deduction includes national pension contributions. For the individual, the contributions are comparable to payment of salaries and are thus neutral from a cost viewpoint. For the individual, employer contributions enable both contributions and the amount subject to tax relief in the annual income tax return to be increased (SOU-series 2000, p.51).

The conditions for withdrawing from the learning account are that contributions must have been made for at least 12 calendar months and that they are used for the purpose of competence development. It is proposed that the amounts withdrawn from the account for this purpose be treated as taxable income subsidised by the state. The state subsidy is in the form of a competence grant premium when funds are withdrawn from the learning account and used to promote competence development. The size is determined by the scope of competence development measured in terms of higher education points. The maximum competence grant premium for full-time studies over a year should be 25% of a base amount (currently SEK 9150). In order for the individual to use the competence grant premium, there should be a requirement that the withdrawal from the learning account is at least twice as large as the competence grant premium.

Another important dimension of the concept of individual learning accounts is related to its connection with social partners and the tradition of negotiations between employers and unions. It is the hope of the government that a system for individual competence development 'can stimulate new collective bargaining solutions between trade unions and employers, direct agreements between wage-earners and employers, as well as for the competence development of the self-employed.' According to the hidden rules of the Swedish labour market system, the state should not intervene too much in workplace learning (Abrahamsson 2001).

The mission of renewal at the workplace in the promotion of new work organisations, new patterns of learning and a better utilisation of skills and competencies should be a challenge for social partners. Negotiations about learning time or redistribution of learning time should be as common as wage-setting policies, policies for flexible working hours or retirement schemes. Thus, the individual learning account model calls for a new lifelong learning contract with stronger involvement of all parties, the state and the municipality, the corporations and the market, and last but not least, the individual. The suggestion also focuses on the need for general competence upgrading and more narrow and corporate-specific knowledge. It is the hope of the government that companies will not under-invest in competence development because of their perception of a risk that employees will change jobs as a result of such competence development.

The implementation of the idea of individual learning accounts has, however, been postponed, partly due to criticism from the Swedish Trade Union Confederation and further discussions within the government.

Lifelong learning in the future

The idea of lifelong learning is nowadays an integrated component of Swedish educational policies. It was strongly promoted in the Adult Education Initiative during the 1990s and it did also influence the experiment and the implementation of a system of advanced education for technicians. Furthermore, lifelong learning is also reflecting higher education policies and the government's objective that 50% of the age cohort should participate in higher education at an age of 25 years. Lifelong learning policies have also been discussed with reference to open access-thinking in higher education admission as well as in new ideas of expanding higher vocationally oriented higher education.

The development of a model of recognition of both formal and non-formal learning can also be included in this context. Finally, issues of lifelong learning, comprehensive education and vocational training are now subject to inquiry in a governmental commission of the renewal of upper secondary education. The directive of this Parliamentary Commission is to create a system with fewer study programs and more flexibility. In addition, it has to be mentioned that lifelong and lifewide learning also has been adopted by the European Commission in its Memorandum for Lifelong Learning and the discussion it has stimulated in the member countries.

Looking ahead, vocational education, general education, on-the-job learning and other experiential learning routes, for example, Internet or computer-based learning, will form related or sometimes combined learning environments in a lifelong learning society. In order to promote more access, increasing learning flexibility and an efficient and learner-friendly outcome, it is of crucial importance that each individual will get necessary basic skills, good subject knowledge and other lifelong learning skills. Thus, there is a genuine and dynamic relation between the quality of compulsory schooling, initial vocational education and lifelong learning. One of the basic ideas of Swedish educational planning has been to postpone selection and specialisation in youth education. The mandate of the new Governmental Commission of Upper Secondary Education tends to support a further step in this direction. The combination of general education, vocational skills, generic skills, as well as learning-to-learn skills, define the access-value of the individual's educational passport in a lifelong learning society.

> *Lifelong learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. The coming decade must see the implementation of this vision. All those living in Europe, without exception, should have equal opportunities to adjust to the demands of social and economic change and to participate actively in the shaping of Europe's future.*[1]

[1] Quoted from the introduction to *A memorandum on lifelong learning*, commission staff working paper, Brussels, 30 October 2000, SEC(2000) 1832.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined some of the most important trends and reforms that have taken place within the Swedish VET system during the 1990s. It has displayed how educational policy makers in Sweden are trying to solve or resolve this dilemma by finding new combinations of the traditional apprenticeship model and the dual system on the one hand, and the use of a more integrated model on the other. The disadvantages of a more traditional apprenticeship model is, of course, that it can be a preparation for a vocation that is decreasing in numbers or being totally redefined. Furthermore, it has some restrictions and limitations with respect to further education and equality of opportunity. The integrated or general model, on the other hand, might loosen the connection with work, and be excessively future-oriented and fail to take account of the fact that most occupations do not disappear overnight.

In terms of the future policies, lifelong learning have to come down from the 'clouds' and have to be analysed in a more specific context with respect to closing specific skill gaps and implementing social, economic and institutional measure to enhance skill upgrading, on-the-job training and lifelong learning for various groups. Traditional institutional, social and psychological barriers will not disappear merely because today we talk about lifelong learning instead of vocational training, adult education or skill formation.

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